

## 13 Was the Holy Spirit Active in First Testament Times?<sup>1</sup>

What was new about the Christian experience of God? After Jesus breathed the Holy Spirit on his disciples and after the Holy Spirit fell at Pentecost, in what sense was the first Christians experience something quite new?

### 1 Talk of the Spirit of God in First Testament Times

On the last day of the festival... Jesus cried out, "Let anyone who is thirsty come to me, and let the one who believes in me drink. As the scripture has said, "Out of the believer's heart shall flow rivers of living water." (John 7:37-38)

Those two sentences raise a number of questions. It may be more likely, for instance, that the one out of whose heart the rivers flow is Jesus, not the believer. But the issue I am concerned with here arises from the comment that John goes on to make:

Now he said this about the Spirit, which believers in him were to receive; for as yet there was no Spirit, because Jesus was not yet glorified. (John 7:39)

Thus the NRSV. It differs from the original RSV, which has "the Spirit was not yet *given*," the reading in some Greek manuscripts. The NRSV assumes that the manuscripts that say "given" are seeking to reduce the scandal of a difficult statement. "The Spirit was not" could sound as if it implied that the Spirit did not exist, which is the kind of misleading impression that a scribe might seek to remove. I think it likely that the NRSV is right and that John wrote "the Spirit was not," though this question, too, need make little difference to the issue we are concerned with here. For if John did write "the Spirit was not," he hardly meant that the Spirit did not exist; he has already referred to the Spirit's activity (see John 1:32-33). Rather he must mean that the Spirit was not generally about, was not obviously there, was not active in relation to believers, or something of that kind. John will tell us later how Jesus breathes the Holy Spirit onto his disciples after his death and resurrection and how he commissions them for their ministry of bringing God's forgiveness (John 20:22-23). Scriptures such as Zech 14:8, which promise a flowing out of living waters, will then be fulfilled. Until that happens, there is no Spirit, the Spirit is not obviously about or active, or the Spirit is not given, says John. The comment parallels the remark attributed to some disciples in Ephesus who knew only John's baptism and had not even heard that there was a Holy Spirit (Acts 19:2); apparently they did not know that Pentecost had taken place. They were still looking forward to the manifestation of the Holy Spirit.

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<sup>1</sup> First published in *Ex auditu* 12 (1996): 14-28.

The trouble is that according to the other Gospels the spirit of God has been very active before Jesus' ministry, and not just in relation to Jesus himself as in John 1:32-33. At the beginning of Luke, Elizabeth is "filled with the Holy Spirit," so is her husband Zechariah, and so will be their son John (Luke 1:15, 41, 67). The Holy Spirit was on the elderly Simeon, who had received a revelation from the Holy Spirit and came "in the Spirit" to the temple (Luke 2:25-27). Long before that, according to Jesus himself David had spoken "in the Holy Spirit" (Mark 12:36).

All those passages mesh with the descriptions of the activity of God's spirit in the First Testament.

In considering these, we need to keep in mind a vital broadness and ambiguity in the Old and New Testament words for spirit. Both *ruakh* and *pneuma* cover breath and wind and spirit. Wind suggests something of the mysterious, invisible, dynamic power of God. Breath stands for life in its own mysterious nature, with its origins and its end outside our control. The wind is the breath of God, and we breathe because God breathes breath into us. The spirit of God or of a human being suggests their personal liveliness and dynamism, their motive power or will. According to the First Testament, from the beginning this spirit of God has been involved in the process whereby God determined what to do in creating the world and in shaping events in the world. "Who has directed the spirit of Yhwh" in the fulfillment of that task (Isa 40:13)? Genesis 1:2 with the *ruakh* of God hovering over the waters, and Job 26:13 with God's *ruakh* involved in creation alongside God's power, understanding, and hand, associate the activity of God's *ruakh* with God's activity from the Beginning. Indeed, the very breath of humanity comes from that breath/wind/spirit of God. Psalm 104:29-30 assumes that human beings and animals breathe in because God's *ruakh* breathes out (cf. Gen 6:3; Isa 42:5; Job 27:3; 33:4; 34:14; Eccles 12:7).

The First Testament thus begins by associating the activity of God's spirit with the world and not merely with the people of God. In the New Testament this activity is narrowed down. Here, talk of God's wisdom or word can relate to the whole cosmos, but God's spirit is confined to the church. From a First Testament perspective, however, "to experience the fellowship of the Spirit inevitably carries Christianity beyond itself into the greater fellowship of all God's creatures. For the *community of creation*, in which all created things exist with one another, for one another and in one another, is also *the fellowship of the Holy Spirit*,"<sup>2</sup> so that experience of the latter leads us into concern for the former.

For our understanding of Christian experience, a further implication of the link between God's spirit and creation is that when God's Spirit comes to fill the Christian church or the Christian believer and comes to produce the moral fruit of the Spirit or to release gifts of the Spirit, these are not bolt-on additions to human nature as created by God, essentially novel enlargements of it. They are the fulfillment of what created human beings were intended to be and have the inherent potential to be. The life of holiness or the utterance of tongues or the ministry of healing are the most natural things in the world, even if they become actual only through supernatural release. And the

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<sup>2</sup> Jürgen Moltmann, *The Spirit of Life* (London: SCM/New York: Harper, 1992), p. 106 (his emphasis); see also *God in Creation* (London: SCM/New York: Harper, 1985), pp. 9-13, 98-103, 255-70.

renewing of the church is the shaping of a microcosm of creation. The breathing of John 20:22 is a repetition of the event of creation; it is an act of new creation. The groaning on the part of the Spirit in Romans 8:23-27 is a sighing for the fulfillment of creation. It is because human beings in general are divinely-created beings inbreathed with God's breath that they sometimes live holy lives, say things that are true and illuminating, and exercise gifts of healing.

Not surprisingly, the First Testament has further statements to make about the involvement of God's spirit with Israel in particular. When Israel was delivered at the Red Sea, this involved God's holy spirit being in their midst and giving them rest (Isa 63:11, 14). When Israel was then directed through the wilderness, this was by God's good spirit (Neh 9:20). As Israel lived their life in the land over the centuries, God's spirit lived among them (Hagg 2:4-5). When they ignored God's expectations and standards, they grieved that holy spirit among them (Isa 63:10) and risked its being withdrawn (Ps 51:11 [13]), or they experienced God's *ruakh* as a scorching blast from which they might like to escape but could not (Isa 4:4; 40:7; Ps 139:7). They thus prayed for God to renew and uphold them with the steadfast, holy, and generous spirit of God that can act on their spirit and make it more like God's (Ps 51:10-12 [12-14]).

The spirit of God also breathed into particular individuals within Israel. This happened to the craftworkers in the shrine, to leaders such as elders, to prophets, and to liberators such as the "judges." Things that they did suggested the life and energy of God; they reflected the active presence of God's *ruakh*.

On the First Testament's own understanding, then, there is no doubt that the spirit of God was about and active in First Testament times, and the attitude that surfaces in the synoptic Gospels makes the same assumption. So what are we to make of John's comment? What was new about the giving of the Spirit through Jesus?

## 2 When the Spirit of God is Active but Unnamed

Before coming to that question, with John's help I want to make it sharper. There is another significance about that comment in John 7:39. When Jesus talks about rivers of living water, he does not explicitly allude to the spirit of God. It is John who *assumes* that he refers to the Spirit, that the Spirit will bring about the fulfillment of Jesus' words. So why does Jesus not actually mention the Spirit? John implies that it is the fact that the Spirit "was not yet [given]" that explains this. In other words, the spirit of God can be being referred to even when the words *ruakh* or *pneuma* do not appear.

That provides us with an important clue for our reading of the First Testament. The actual phrase "holy spirit" comes in only two passages in the First Testament, Isa 63 and Ps 51, but this is in a sense a misleading observation. Arguably, in First Testament thinking either adjective or noun is redundant in this expression. "Spirit" defines the being of God, in dynamic power (cf. Isa 31:3). And "holy" defines the being of God, in supernatural awesomeness (cf. Hos 11:9b). It is therefore hardly surprising that the two words are so rarely combined; they risk tautology. Any reference to the spirit of God must be a reference to the holy spirit of God. John's comment puts us

on the track of the suspicion that there are many First Testament references to the work of the Holy Spirit that are not identified as such. These include passages that use the word *ruakh*, but also other passages that do not. With hindsight, John implies, we can recognize reference to the Holy Spirit even where the Holy Spirit is unmentioned.

This issue surfaces within the First Testament itself. Whereas it talks of the activity of the spirit of Yhwh in connection with some prophets, such as Elijah, Elisha, and Ezekiel, it does not do so in connection with others such as Jeremiah. Jeremiah's experience of the pressure of Yhwh upon him was in its way as tumultuous as Ezekiel's, but he did not describe it in terms of Yhwh's spirit. He is usually reckoned to be avoiding such language because it is in some way discredited, perhaps through its use by other prophets from whom Jeremiah wished to distance himself. But if we reckon that Ezekiel was acted on by the Holy Spirit, it is natural to reckon that this was also true of Jeremiah, even if Jeremiah avoids saying so. There is no systematic tension between God's word and God's spirit in the First Testament (see Ps 33:6).

It can be dangerous to read back Christian theological ways of thinking into the First Testament. We can easily miss the thrust of what the First Testament has to tell us by reading it through Christian spectacles too quickly. When translations translate *ruakh* by Spirit with a capital S, they risk misleading us. In Ps 51:11 [13], TNIV has Holy Spirit with capital H and capital S, the RSV has holy Spirit with small h and capital S, while the NRSV has small h and small s. There are snags about the use of capitals which may make us read later meanings back into the passages and thus miss the passages' own meaning, miss what God's very spirit had to say to people through the words as they would hear them in their day. But at some stage we may properly look at the First Testament with Christian theological categories in connection with reaching a theological understanding of it that will enable us to interpret God's activity in the world and the church today.

In the First Testament, talk of the spirit of God is one of a number of ways of talking about the presence and activity of God. One can speak of God's arm, or hand, or finger, or face, or eyes, or wisdom, or name, or angel—or of God's breath. All these are ways of speaking of God's presence and activity. There are two strengths in this way of speaking. One is that the terms speak of these realities in a way that is more concrete than mere general reference to God. God's arm suggests God's power, God's hand suggests God's direct activity, God's face suggests God's personal concern, and so on. They also have the advantage of providing ways of speaking of God's presence and activity that preserve an awareness of God's absoluteness and transcendence. We "only" experienced God's arm or hand; we do not pretend to have experienced all of God.

Reference to God's *ruakh* is an instance of such speech. It suggests that God is truly present and active, with the power of wind and the liveliness of breath and the personal decisiveness of human decision-making, but it does so in a way that safeguards God's mystery. Wind and breath are invisible and are known only by their effects (cf. John 3:8).

In early Christianity the metaphor of God's breath/wind/spirit became so dominant among those First Testament anthropomorphic expressions that it largely subsumed all the others. People stopped talking so much about God's arm or God's face. The process can be seen within the New Testament

in the parallel between the casting out of demons by God's finger (Luke 11:20) or by God's spirit (Matt 12:28). Talk of God's spirit became *the* way of envisaging the presence and activity of God in the world. Perhaps, a colleague suggests to me, a reason for the dominance of spirit language henceforth was the emergence of body-of-Christ language. Arms, fingers, and face now belong to that divine-human body, itself indwelt by divine breath.

An implication of this development is that wherever within the First Testament there is talk of God's arm or hand or finger or face or eyes, in our terms what it is speaking of is the activity of the Holy Spirit. To use John's formulation, it did not speak in terms of the Holy Spirit because the Spirit was not yet [given]. That talk would only become dominant after the events referred to in John 20 and Acts 2. The Holy Spirit was there and active in First Testament times, but the language for expressing the Spirit's activity was more varied than was later the case.

Another example of the Spirit's being involved though unnamed in First Testament times emerges in the realm of worship. The New Testament assumes that the Holy Spirit inspires our worship. It is because the Holy Spirit is present and active among us that we sing God's praise and call upon God in prayer. It is as we are filled with the Spirit that we sing psalms and hymns and spiritual songs (Eph 5:19-20). So what is going on when First Testament Israel sings psalms? When the church took over the Psalms and made the Psalter its own hymnbook, one implication was that these hymns, thanksgivings, and prayers were ones inspired by the Spirit. That is the point Jesus makes with regard to Ps 110 in Mark 12:36. And presumably we are to apply to the Psalter the generalization in 2 Tim 3:15-16 about the First Testament scriptures being *theopneustos*, God-breathed, inspired or exspired by God's Spirit, or (as I incline to think the word suggests) produced as a result of people being blown over by God. In New Testament terms, these praises and prayers are a fruit of the Spirit, even if they are not described as such in the First Testament (though see passages such as Pss 45:1-2; 49:1-4 [2-5]). The Holy Spirit was involved in First Testament worship.

In Israel people were not much inclined to speak of themselves as sons and daughters of God and of God as their Father, though they sometimes did so (Isa 43:6 is noteworthy as the only passage in the entire Bible—except where it is quoted in 2 Cor 6:18)—where God says “my daughters”). That may have been because it was too cheap and easy an idea. In the First Testament world, as in ours, people assumed that God was their father, and the First Testament perhaps distanced itself from that assumption as it distanced itself from the usually-accepted idea that there would be an afterlife. But the confidence, lack of inhibition, and enthusiasm of First Testament prayer and praise indicate that the people who prayed the Psalms enjoyed the same relationship as the one the New Testament speaks of in terms of being sons and daughters. People prayed in the Spirit to the Father, even if they did not put it that way.

The Holy Spirit was also involved in the everyday lives of people who produced the fruit of the Spirit. The fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, generosity, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control. When I read First Testament stories of Ruth, Hannah, Josiah, or Nehemiah, I read stories of people whose lives have such features. They are not described as people in whom the Holy Spirit is active, but that is what they are.

Further, this feature of First Testament experience seems to rule out one way of seeking to articulate the difference between Old and New Testament experience of the Holy Spirit, as an intermittent rather than a continuing matter, or a corporate rather than an individual matter. The Holy Spirit was active on an ongoing basis in the lives of individuals in the First Testament as well as being involved on an occasional and a corporate basis.

All this adds force to the issue John raises for us. There is so much activity of the Holy Spirit in First Testament times, so how can John speak of the Holy Spirit as not yet given?

### 3 When the Spirit of God Is Hoped for

One reason for John's speaking of the Holy Spirit as not yet given will be the way the First Testament itself speaks of a future endowment of God's spirit. It appears in Ezek 36 - 37 (anticipated in Ezek 11:17-20). There it is one of a number of images of God's future work in Israel. Some are literal: the people will return to their land, will obey God's commands, and will prosper in the land. Others presuppose the metaphor of the people as having one body, one heart, and one spirit. The "heart" in First Testament thinking corresponds most closely to the mind in ours. Currently the people's heart or mind is like stone. This image suggests inert, inactive, and lifeless (Exod 15:16; Hab 2:19), not directly "resistant" as we may assume, though that doubtless follows. God will replace their stone-dead mind with a mind that is more like flesh—vital and lively, or spirited (as we might say). A mind like flesh, a new spirit, and God's spirit are parallel expressions in Ezek 36:26-27. In the New Testament it will become pejorative to describe someone's mind as fleshly, and in subsequent Christianity it will become customary to assume an antithesis between the spiritual and the bodily. In the First Testament to describe the mind as fleshly is a positive statement and the spirit is at home in the body. The image of people being made fleshly, lively, and spirited becomes an allegory in the following vision in Ezek 37, of the dry bones that are turned first into corpses and then into living people by the infusion of the divine spirit/wind/breath. All this will lead to the world coming to recognize that Yhwh is God; the worldwide perspective of Gen 1 - 11 will be regained.

The image recurs in Isa 44:15 where "my spirit" is parallel with "my blessing" and these two are parallel with water and streams. It is the very imagery of John 7, though Isa 44 is not a passage that the New Testament directly appeals to. In Isa 44 the imagery suggests a renewal of the community at all levels, in its numbers, status, morale, faith, and social life.

It recurs again in Joel 2:28-29 [3:1-2] in a promise for all people. There the fulfillment of this promise will issue in prophecies, dreams, and visions. The promise is followed seamlessly by reference to the great and terrible day of Yhwh. And it is this passage that provides Acts 2 with the clue to understanding what is going on at the first Pentecost after Jesus' resurrection.

What do prophecies such as these imply regarding God's activity in First Testament times? Do they indicate the assumption that God's spirit was not active, was not obviously there?

The perspective suggested by a number of passages is that in these prophets' day God's spirit was indeed not obviously active, but that people

were aware of such an activity in the past. The possibility of God's spirit being withdrawn is presupposed by Ps 51:10-12 [12-14], a psalm that brings several issues into focus. Its heading suggests a connection with David, and in modern parlance invites us to take this as a royal psalm. That would make good sense of the reference to Yhwh's holy spirit, for the king is one with whom Yhwh's spirit is especially associated. It is evident that hopes of the king being filled with Yhwh's spirit were often disappointed, so that this is the content of the promises in passages such as Isa 11:1-5. But aspects of the content of Ps 51 make it unlikely that its heading tells us its actual origin; from the David who had had an affair with Bathsheba and arranged for her husband's death Yhwh could hardly have accepted a prayer in which David professed to have sinned against Yhwh alone (Ps 51:4 [6]), and the closing verses seem to presuppose a setting after the fall of Jerusalem. Perhaps, then, headings such as that to Ps 51 are lectionary notes, designed not to determine authorship but to suggest contexts against which to read the psalm in question.<sup>3</sup> The headings link the psalms in question with essentially "private" events in David's life of the kind that can have equivalents in the lives of ordinary people. They thus imply (in this case) that ordinary people might see themselves as knowing the presence of Yhwh's holy spirit; this was not confined to people such as judges, kings, and prophets. If we leave the heading on one side for a moment, on the other hand, it makes good sense to see the psalm as a communal one, spoken by the community after the fall of Jerusalem, its "I" either indicating its awareness of itself as a corporate entity or being the "I" of each individual within the community that prays it (compare the "I" of the prayer in Lam 3). It is then the community that asks that God's holy spirit be not withdrawn from it.

Whoever prays the prayer mentions the spirit three times in Ps 51:10-12 [12-14]. Each time, the word begins the second half of the line and is followed by a qualifying adjective. It seems natural to take "spirit" to refer to the spirit of God each time, or to the spirit of God at work on the human spirit:<sup>4</sup> The only point at which the psalm refers unequivocally to the human spirit is the later allusion to a broken spirit (Ps 51:17 [19]). In Ps 51:10-12 [12-14] the psalm prays that God's upright, holy, generous spirit may be given, may not be withdrawn, and may sustain. The failures of the past make it entirely possible to envisage Yhwh's withholding that spirit; but if Yhwh does, that is the end.

The experience of God's spirit being known in the past but not now is explicit in Isa 63, which speaks of the presence and activity of Yhwh's holy spirit within the people at the time of the exodus, the escape from the Red Sea, and the entering into the land. That was once a reality, but the people now see no evidence of such activity. A similar perspective is implicit in Isa 44. The kind of refreshment, blessing, flourishing, and recognition of Yhwh of which Isa 44:1-5 speak and which can also be envisaged by the figure of Yhwh's *ruakh* being poured on people has been known in the past but seems to be missing in the community's present experience of Yhwh's punishment.

<sup>3</sup> So Brevard S. Childs, "Psalm Titles and Midrashic Exegesis," *JSS* 16 (1971): 137-50; *Introduction to the Old Testament as Scripture* (London: SCM/Philadelphia: Fortress, 1979), pp. 520-22.

<sup>4</sup> See M. E. Tate, *Psalms 51—100* (Dallas: Word, 1990), pp. 22-25.

Something more equivocal has to be said about Ezekiel. The community that is now lifeless and hopeless will be brought back to life by the inbreathing of Yhwh's *ruah*. That suggests the assumption that before their death that *ruakh* was present; what is needed is its return. On the other hand, Ezekiel has a radically negative view of the people's previous life, and the promise in Ezek 36:26-27 implies a radically negative assessment of the people's spirit. Only if Yhwh's spirit is put within them will they come to live Yhwh's way. By implication, their failure over many centuries reflects the fact that this spirit has not been put into them before. Something creatively new is needed, and the breathing in of Yhwh's spirit is that new thing.

In Joel, the implication seems to be that the pouring of Yhwh's spirit is a repeat of something that has been known in the past but is not known now, yet that this pouring will surpass what has been known before. It will envelop not merely isolated individuals but people of all ages and classes and both sexes. Joel thus implies the conviction that God intends to do something in the future that will be even more splendid than what God has done in the past. He thus most clearly implies a typological way of thinking in which future events will parallel past events but exceed them in wonder.

#### 4 When Are These Hopes Fulfilled?

In some sense these prophetic promises were fulfilled in the Second Temple period. The community was renewed; the presence of Yhwh returned. At the same time, passages such as Isa 63 themselves witness to the recognition that many hopes were unfulfilled. John then implies the conviction that the new thing that God promised has now come about in true fullness in Jesus Christ. It is part of God's ultimate act having taken place in him. The End has come in Jesus. The last days have arrived. The Spirit is now about and active because Jesus has been about and active; the Spirit (we now realize) is the Spirit of Jesus.

Yet that is not the whole truth. In another sense the End has still not come, any more than it had in Second Temple Judaism. The last days have still not arrived. Everything continues as it did before, to echo the complaint reported in 2 Pet 3:4.

This is not merely a chronological point. We must consider the question in what sense God really has now fulfilled the promises in Ezek 36 - 37. Ezekiel envisages the people given a lively, spirited, flexible mind such as will enable them to walk in God's ways and share God's perspective and concern for the world. The Jewish-Gentile church reckons to be the heir to that promise. Yet it is not obvious that this church any more possesses a consistently lively, spirited, flexible, responsive, God-aware, world-aware mind than First Testament Israel did. The promise has not been fulfilled.

A consideration of the parallel prophecy in Jer 31:31-34 may help to sharpen the point, though in keeping with the apparent avoidance of spirit language in Jeremiah it does not explicitly mention God's spirit. It promises that Yhwh's teaching will be written into the attitudes of the people rather as regulations are written in a registrar's mind. As a result they will not need to teach or exhort each other to acknowledge Yhwh because they will all individually do so instinctively. Hebrews at one point says that this promise has been kept (Heb 8:8-12; 10:14-17), yet it may seem to deny it by the extent



to which it offers teaching and exhortation. And in due course the New Testament encourages the development of an institutional ministry corresponding to that of First Testament Israel whose end Jeremiah heralds (further, Rom 11:27 locates the realization of Jer 31:31-34 in the future).<sup>5</sup>

Joel similarly promised that the spirit of Yhwh would make it natural for people of all ages and classes and of both sexes to prophesy, in keeping with Moses' longing (Num 11:29). Acts declares that Joel's promise has been fulfilled. But in the history of the church the gift of prophecy has been hardly more prevalent than was the case within First Testament Israel, and the priesthood of First Testament Israel has been reestablished in the church.

Paul pictures the Holy Spirit as dwelling in the Christian community as if the community were a temple, and speaks of this as a fulfillment of First Testament hopes that built on the recognition that the God who dwelt and traveled with the people of Abraham and Moses cannot be contained in stone buildings (2 Cor 6:16). The Christian church then rebuilt the First Testament temple in its buildings with their common tripartite structure and transferred the word church to these buildings.

In practice the position and lives of Christian believers is not so very different from that of First Testament believers. We are like Ruth and Daniel who produce the fruit of the Spirit, but also like Jacob and David who more obviously live more according to the flesh. It is as if the Spirit is not yet [given].

## 5 The Witness of the Spirit

So what did Jesus actually achieve? What difference did his coming make? Classically there is an objective, datable aspect to this question, and a subjective, experiential aspect. Jesus was the first human being to live his whole life by the Spirit in obedience to the Father; it was this that enabled him by his final act of obedience to make atonement for the rest of humanity. Henceforth, the whole world is to be invited to live with God on the basis of this act of self-offering. On what basis did First Testament Israel live with God before this event, then, given that it had been invited to do so? It was surely on the same basis, though the event had not yet taken place. Jesus' act of obedience by anticipation applied to those First Testament believers too. They lived with God on the same basis as we do. They too prayed in the Spirit to the Father through Christ, though they used none of these prepositional phrases.

Or suppose we put Jesus' achievement in terms of his winning a unique victory over powers of evil, whose fruits can also be enjoyed by people who belong to him. Did First Testament Israel exercise victory over powers of evil? That was intended from Gen 1 and experienced in Egypt and at the Red Sea, while in the Psalms, Israelites put evil to flight and enjoy the freedom to bless and to curse. Again the effectiveness of Jesus' act applied to First Testament believers.

Or suppose we put Jesus' achievement in terms of the opening of the door to eternal life. Were First Testament believers to stay dead when they died? Here more explicitly New Testament writers imply the conviction that

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<sup>5</sup> See further chapter 9 above, §6-7.

this door is opened for people who lived before Christ as well as for his contemporaries and for people who would live afterwards (e.g., Matt 27:51-53; 1 Pet 4:6).

Or suppose we put Jesus' significance in terms that have been more appealing over the past century. Jesus took experience of human life, suffering, and death into the Godhead. Here something novel happened, though again it is something in continuity with the First Testament, for the possibility of God's becoming human was grounded in humanity's having been made in God's image, and the First Testament hints at the pain in the heart of God at the awareness of human pain. It was not least in the context of their distress that Israel knew the manifestation of Yhwh's personal presence in the form of the dynamic presence of Yhwh's holy spirit (Isa 63.8-14). Even the capacity to die was a capacity in God from the beginning.

In the datable once-for-all Christ-event with a before and after, however, Jesus did make his offering, win his victory, open a door, and take the experience of death into the Godhead. And all that gave the Spirit something to witness to (John 14:26; 16:14).<sup>6</sup> The nature of witness is that its object is something that has actually happened. Objectively and in theory it might make no difference to believers whether they lived before or after Christ, because Christ's achievement applies to people before him as well as after him. Subjectively, however, it would make a significant difference, because to people who live after Christ the Spirit can give explicit witness to what Christ has now actually done, as something that can be directly reflected on and appreciated.

So after the actual death of Christ, people can understand directly how it affects them; and to judge from a passage such as Rom 6, understanding this will make a difference to their experience of its fruits. After the actual death of Christ, people can know that the great victory over evil has been won. This will naturally add to their expectations of what God can achieve through them. After the actual death of Christ, people can know that they will enjoy eternal life, rather than being ignorant of this fact. They can know the Spirit as the spirit of eternal life, not just of this life. That, too, will make a difference to their present experience as they now live their life in new hope. After the actual death of Christ, people have new concrete evidence of the length, depth, height, and breadth of the love of God, and the Spirit has more basis on which to overwhelm them with the love of God (Rom 5:5).

In each case the difference in the nature of the Christian experience of God comes not simply because of what Christ has done; First Testament believers also enjoyed the benefits of that. It comes from their being able to know about what Christ has done, to receive the Spirit's witness to it, which can be given because it is now something actual. It is this that makes for a difference between Abraham's experience of God and Paul's. And it is for this reason that God's expectations of the people of Jesus can be higher than God's expectations of First Testament Israel. Whereas they lived by faith, in this sense we live by sight. The Spirit can explicitly work to the expression in us of a cross-shaped life.

That also makes it the more pathetic that the people of Jesus are as much like Jacob and David as like Ruth and Hannah, and that the Christian

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<sup>6</sup> Cf. H. F. Woodhouse, "The Holy Ghost Was Not Yet Given," *Theology* 167 (1964): 310-12.

community may seem to experience less victory over evil than Israel did, and less freedom in prayer and praise than the First Testament envisages.

Taking John 7 in isolation could lead to Christians operating with a once-for-all-step-upwards model of the relationship between the activity of the Holy Spirit in Old and New Testament times. More appropriate is an up-and-down model that presupposes gains and losses within First Testament times and recognizes that the Holy Spirit has by no means yet finished with us (which had better be so, after all).

On the one hand, then, the nature of First Testament believers' relationship with God in the Holy Spirit needs to be taken more seriously; they model for us a life lived in the Spirit. On the other, all the potential of God's ultimate act in Jesus lies before us in a more explicit way than was the case for them. A crucial key to entering into it is knowledge of it, because that is the one thing we have that the First Testament saints did not have. This key, in fact, is the study of scripture. It is a potential key to discovering the riches we have in Christ Jesus in the Spirit, riches that far exceed anything we have begun to enjoy. Like First Testament Israel, we are invited to live in hope, in the sense of living in the conviction that what God intends for us far exceeds what we now experience. It is the Holy Spirit who encourages that hope, who is the guarantee that it is not empty hope, who works in us whatever fulfillment of it we now experience, who has the capacity to work in us that fulfillment that goes far beyond what we have begun to enjoy, and who invites us actively to seek that fulfillment.